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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Eighteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD (PARTIAL)* OF THE 473rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 4 June 1998, at noon

Chairperson: Ms. MASON

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* No summary record was prepared for the first part (closed) of the meeting.

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The discussion covered in the summary record began at 12.05 p.m.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER UNITED NATIONS BODIES, SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER COMPETENT BODIES (agenda item 6)

1. The CHAIRPERSON invited the representatives of United Nations specialized agencies and other competent bodies to inform the Committee of the latest developments in their respective areas of competence. She first drew the attention of the Committee to a document prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights relating to a preliminary inquiry on technical advice and assistance within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the Committee might find useful in carrying out its work.

2. Ms. BASSANI (United Nations Children's Fund), reviewing the role and objectives of UNICEF's Regional Office in Geneva, said that the Office was responsible for relations with industrialized countries and worked mainly with the national committees of UNICEF and other strategic partners. The main role of the Regional Office was to encourage the Governments of industrialized countries to increase assistance to the poorest countries and thus honour the commitments they had made towards children in these countries. The Regional Office fulfilled that role by participating in the formulation of policies relating to children and promoting a distribution of budgetary resources which accorded greater importance to programmes in favour of children.

3. UNICEF's Regional Office in Geneva carried out three types of activity. Firstly, it worked to strengthen cooperation between the Governments of industrialized countries, especially in Europe, in implementing the Convention. Secondly, it supported efforts to monitor the implementation of the Convention. She informed the Committee of two initiatives in that regard: the creation of the Centre for Europe's Children in Glasgow, the result of collaboration between the University of Glasgow, UNICEF and the Council of Europe, which would post, on a Website, maximum information on policies relating to children; and the preparation of indicators on children, with the cooperation of the European Union, in order to improve the focus of public awareness campaigns for children's rights. Thirdly, the Regional Office endeavoured to strengthen existing links with European institutions, especially the Council of Europe and the European Parliament.

4. Ms. MILLER (United Nations Children's Fund) drew the attention of the Committee members to several recent UNICEF documents concerning the implementation of the Convention. The first was a draft guide that was more detailed than the manual on the implementation of the Convention and gave concrete examples of implementation, in particular with respect to general implementation measures. The second document explained UNICEF's position on the setting up of an international criminal court. UNICEF would be represented at the diplomatic conference, to be held in Rome in June 1998, to support efforts to place the examination of children's rights violations within the Court's jurisdiction. The third document related to the application of UNICEF policies in relation to special child-protection measures. The next document described a new approach to the design of UNICEF programmes based on children's rights. There were three other documents which had been presented within the context of the United Nations reform. The first

had to do with UNICEF's role within the United Nations system; the second contained a number of replies to questions covering the entire spectrum of UNICEF's human rights activities, and the third dealt with the integration of human rights in UNICEF. Lastly, following negotiations with the Sudanese Government, which had taken place at the beginning of the year, UNICEF and the UNHCR had managed to obtain the release and return of 17 Ugandan children who had been abducted. It was hoped that the same could be achieved for other Ugandan children.

5. Ms. MADUAKOH (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that, regarding the reunification of families, the UNHCR was focusing primarily on refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone. Officials had recently been appointed in the various regions of the world and problems relating to child refugees were now being treated separately, with certain agents devoting themselves exclusively to the protection of such children.

6. UNHCR was also trying to put an end to the forced enlistment of children, especially Sudanese children, which sometimes occurred in refugee camps. Problems relating to the detention of minors, in particular asylum-seekers, continued to be a source of concern to the UNHCR and steps had been taken, in collaboration with the Council of Europe, to find a solution. UNHCR attached great importance to the right to education and was organizing courses on conflict-resolution mechanisms.

7. Mr. ROBINSON (World Health Organization) said that, at the last World Health Assembly, a resolution had been adopted with the aim of involving the WHO more directly in the activities of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In that resolution (WHA 51.22), the Director-General of WHO had been asked to contribute to the collective efforts of the international community to promote the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by States parties and to strengthen the cooperation of WHO within the United Nations system at the national, regional and international levels, in particular with UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNFPA, UNDP, ILO and to strengthen further cooperation between WHO and the Committee on the Rights of the Child and collaborate with Member States in preparing the relevant parts of reports submitted to the Committee and in implementing its recommendations.

8. Significant efforts had been made to improve coordination within WHO itself and to enable it to assist the Committee more effectively in its consideration of States parties' reports. Also, WHO was studying ways of improving parts of States parties' reports relating to health. It was also preparing a guide on children's rights for WHO regional representatives so that they could be more closely associated with the activities of national committees entrusted with monitoring the application of the Convention.

9. Ms. MALUWA (UNAIDS) said that in 1998 the world campaign against AIDS targeted mainly children and young people. A meeting had been held in March 1998 on methods of preventing mother-to-child transmission of the HIV virus. She also recalled that the Twelfth World Conference on AIDS Prevention would be held in Geneva from 28 June to 3 July 1998 and said that, as far as UNAIDS was concerned, emphasis would be placed on the protection of children's

rights. Workshops would be held, on such topics as the transmission of the HIV virus from mother to child, and on AIDS orphans. Furthermore, UNAIDS would prepare a standard report by the end of the year which would serve as a guide to States parties to the Convention in drawing up periodic reports to be submitted to the Committee. As to the next Day of General Discussion, UNAIDS proposed using the services of a consultant to ensure better coordination between organizations' contributions.

10. Ms. THEYTAZ-BERGMAN (NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child) said that two regional meetings of national NGO coalitions had been held recently. The European coalitions had met in March 1998 with the participation of 21 coalitions from western and central Europe. That first meeting was basically an opportunity for the countries represented to share their experiences and to make specific suggestions on how to implement fully the provisions of the Convention. The second regional meeting, held in April 1998, had brought together the national coalitions of countries in western Africa. Nine national coalitions had participated, as well as four other countries of the region which did not yet have national coalitions, so that they could benefit from the experiences of other countries. All the countries of western Africa had attended, except for Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Liberia.

11. The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child was willing to contribute to the Committee's general observations and was thus available to provide any technical assistance or advisory services which the Committee might need.

12. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the representatives of the specialized agencies and other competent bodies for the extremely useful information they had provided. She invited the members of the Committee to make their own observations.

13. Mr. FULCI said that the Preparatory Committee on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, of which he was a member, had completed its work in April 1998 and the recommendations adopted in relation to children's rights, which should, in principle, be approved at the Rome Conference in June and July 1998, had focused on the age of criminal responsibility, aggravating and extenuating circumstances and the protection of the rights of children who had been victims of acts within the jurisdiction of the court.

14. One of the proposals incorporated in the draft statute was that the international criminal court should consider the recruiting of children under 15 years old into armed forces or the use of children under 15 in armed conflict as crimes. It had also been proposed, in particular by UNICEF and some non-governmental organizations, that the exploitation of children for the purpose of prostitution should be made a crime also falling within the jurisdiction of the international criminal court. Also, to strengthen child protection measures, it was proposed that the fact that a crime was committed against a child under 18 years of age should be considered an aggravating circumstance. It had also been recommended that the competence of the international criminal court should be restricted to persons over 18 years of age, in accordance with the principle proclaimed in the Convention that a child was anyone below the age of 18 years. Furthermore, a new provision had

been introduced concerning the need to ensure that the members of the court had special competence in the area of violence against children. He assured the Committee that he would continue to stress that the statute of the future international criminal court should conform fully with the principles and provisions of the Convention.

15. Ms. MBOI said that she had represented the Committee on the Rights of the Child at a regional meeting for Asia and the Pacific organized by UNICEF and attended by 15 countries of the region. The aim of the meeting had been to strengthen national coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the Convention. The meeting had proved extremely useful and it would be good if other similar meetings could be organized in other regions of the world.

16. She welcomed the adoption of resolution 51.22 on the health of children and adolescents by the fifty-first World Health Assembly and hoped that all the necessary monitoring and evaluation measures would be implemented to ensure that the provisions of the resolution were rigorously applied. She said she hoped that the directors of the UNAIDS programme would participate fully in the preparation of the Day of General Discussion on children and AIDS, to be held during the Committee's nineteenth session.

17. Ms. KARP asked whether UNICEF intended to expand on the content of children's rights in its updated manual on the implementation of the Convention, in order to encourage persons interested in the protection of children's rights, such as lawyers, teachers and psychologists, to adopt a more balanced view of children's rights in relation to the rights of adults.

18. Mr. KOLOSOV said that the ASIANET network planned to hold a workshop in November for five countries of central Asia: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The workshop would focus on the situation of children's rights, and many issues within the competence of ILO, UNHCR and WHO, would be raised. He said he hoped that the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations involved would be able to participate in the workshop and contribute to solving the enormous problems affecting children in those former Soviet Socialist Republics.

19. Ms. SARDENBERG welcomed the preliminary survey carried out by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on technical advice and assistance within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. That document would be extremely useful in evaluating all issues concerning international cooperation in the implementation of the Convention. She also welcomed the initiative taken by UNICEF to fine-tune indicators for assessing the situation of children in States parties, as those indicators would take on increasing importance when States parties began to submit their periodic reports to the Committee. Also, it was good that UNICEF's mandate had been widened to include industrialized countries, but care would have to be taken to ensure that the new mandate did not jeopardize UNICEF's actions for the benefit of developing countries.

20. Ms. PALME said she would like to know whether the High Commissioner for Refugees contributed, especially in cooperation with UNICEF, to activities in conflict resolution and education for peace. UNICEF could no longer focus

only on children in developing countries when it had become indispensable for the tragic plight of children in industrialized countries to be also taken into account.

21. Ms. MADUAKOH (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR collaborated essentially with UNESCO in activities relating to education for peace and conflict resolution. For example, a pilot project had been launched in Kenyan camps housing a large number of Somali refugees to acquaint them with their rights and encourage camp officials to work for peaceful conflict resolution. UNHCR was also helping to repatriate refugees to Somalia and, if that pilot project proved effective, other similar projects for the reception of returnees could be carried out, in areas such as the former Yugoslavia.

22. Ms. BASSANI (United Nations Children's Fund) said that UNICEF's Executive Board had clearly decided that activities undertaken by UNICEF in industrialized countries would be financed by the national committees themselves and that UNICEF would not use any of its own funds for those activities. She had taken note of the Committee's suggestions and recommendations and would ensure that they were duly followed up.

23. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the representatives of UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, UNAIDS and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for their contributions and generous participation in the Committee's work.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.